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Whether the Canadian govt. should break up cross- ownership of newspapers, TV networks and Internet Web sites is being considered by a parliamentary committee that Tues. began a year-long review of news media convergence: "It is time to take a fresh snapshot of Canadian media industries and examine the quality and diversity of news and information Canadians need and deserve," Chmn. Joan Fraser said. When earlier studies were done, "24-hour all-news networks did not exist in **Canada**; the World Wide Web had not been born; and convergence and multimedia concentration of ownership had not yet left their mark on the business and profession of journalism," the committee said. In opening comments, Fraser said "the growing concentration of ownership and cross- ownership have raised concerns in some sectors." Tom Kent, who chaired the 1981 royal commission on newspapers, told the committee that cross-ownership was "certainly not in the interests of democratic diversity of opinion." But Fraser stressed that the latest inquiry wasn't seeking govt. control over news media: "It's not that we're starting out saying the state ought to get involved in the newsrooms of the nation -- my bias is the exact opposite." She said the question the committee would seek to answer was whether govt. policies needed to change to ensure "Canadians have a healthy, independent, diverse new media." Over the coming months, the committee will hear from "just about everybody that matters," including regulators, media owners, journalists and "ordinary Canadians" who are the consumers of news and information, she said. -- CP

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